

6 Ways to Take a Mental Vacation

Sometimes you need to get away, but you don't have the time or money. Don't despair: A mental vacation can help reduce your stress.

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Small stressors can quickly add up to major **stress** and one big stressful event can send you reeling, with no idea of how to start addressing it. If you could just get away for a little stress relief, you know you would be okay. But too few of us have the time — or the money — to run off on an impromptu vacation.



Well, you don't have to spend a dime or go anywhere other than a quiet spot nearby to take a mental vacation.

Stress Relief: Take Off on a Mental Vacation

If you don't find a way to reduce stress, your health will pay the price, both mentally and physically. It's not necessary to get a lengthy **massage** or head to a beach to relax — you can unwind every day in simple ways and still get a major benefit.

"People who are under a lot of stress have physical problems related to constantly being under stress," says Sally R. Connolly, a social worker and therapist at the Couples Clinic of Louisville in Louisville, Ky. "And if you don't find ways [to relieve it], even in small periods of time, you can have long-term consequences." It's crucial to add stress relief to your everyday routine, she says.

Connolly suggests learning techniques to reduce stress and trying to sneak in one or two each day. "Even if it's five minutes in the morning and five minutes at night, just find time to do that," she says.

Stress Relief: Six Quick Mental Trips

Visualizing a stress-free place and other relaxation techniques are quick and easy ways to help your whole body calm down and give you just the boost you need to get on with your day. Connolly suggests these six ways for you to slip away on a mental vacation to reduce stress:

1. **Read a book in bed.** Connolly says this is a great escape and can leave you feeling refreshed, relaxed, and ready to face whatever is outside your bedroom door. Your bed is warm, cozy, comfortable, and a peaceful place for you. It feels luxurious, and getting lost in a good book is a perfect way to forget, then refocus, your own thoughts.
2. **Visualize relaxation.** Steal a few quiet moments to close your eyes and think of an image that relaxes you — such as the warm sun on your skin and the sound of the ocean, a big country field sprinkled with flowers, or a trickling stream. Connolly suggests thinking back to a time when you felt peaceful and relaxed, and focus on releasing the tension from your toes to your head.
3. **Look at pictures from a happy time.** Connolly recommends pulling out snapshots from a photo album of a family vacation or a fun dinner with friends. Reflect on your memories of that occasion, and what made it so enjoyable. Spend a few quiet moments reminiscing, and you'll find yourself more relaxed.
4. **Look out a window.** Distract yourself by focusing on something other than what's stressing you. Grab a steaming cup of coffee or tea, close the door, and take a mental break. Do a little people watching, appreciate any birds within view, or enjoy some fluffy clouds rolling by. Allow yourself to daydream for a few minutes.
5. **Listen to a relaxation CD.** Invest in a couple of these CDs for a short daily escape, says Connolly. You may like to hear chirping birds, rolling waves, or gentle rain — whatever your choice, closing your eyes and listening to these soothing sounds while doing some deep breathing can help you relax and de-stress.
6. **Take a walk.** **Exercise** is a great way to relieve stress because it's a great escape for your mind. Head out for a quiet early morning walk or lace up your sneakers on your lunch break. Walking along a trail, waterfront, or other peaceful place when possible may offer even more relaxation.

Treat yourself to a 5-, 10-, or 20-minute mental vacation each day and train your body to relax and reduce stress — you'll be amazed at how much better you feel after taking just a few luxurious moments all to yourself.